

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

MOVE OVER MOSES, WE MIGHT BE HERE TO STAY

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 07-04-2003		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED (FROM - TO) xx-xx-2002 to xx-xx-2003	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Move Over Moses, We Might Be Here To Stay Unclassified				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Clarke, Donald I ; Author				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS U.S. Army War College Carlisle Barracks Carlisle, PA17013-5220				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME AND ADDRESS ,				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT APUBLIC RELEASE					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT See attached file.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 26	19. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Rife, Dave RifeD@awc.carlisle.army.mil
a. REPORT Unclassified	b. ABSTRACT Unclassified	c. THIS PAGE Unclassified	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER International Area Code Area Code Telephone Number DSN		
					Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98) Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39.18

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: LTC Donald Clarke)

TITLE: MOVE OVER MOSES, WE MIGHT BE HERE TO STAY

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 07 April 2003

PAGES: 26

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

Determine the feasibility of implementing an exit strategy for withdrawal of U.S. forces from participation in the Multinational Forces and Observers (MFO), Sinai. This topic briefly addresses the events, both historically and politically, which have resulted in United States involvement in the MFO, Sinai, a commitment which has spanned the past 21 years.

Not long after assuming his duties as the Secretary of Defense, Secretary Rumsfeld made a comment to an interviewer from the Cable News Network (CNN) that he would "push forward with plans to withdraw 860 U.S. soldiers monitoring the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt." Additionally, with regards to continued support of the Multinational Forces and Observers (MFO), Sinai, Secretary Rumsfeld also stated "I don't think that the United States has to have forces in every country of the world, and I don't think we have to have them in the same place for 20 years at a time."

Though contradicted the next day by Secretary of State Powell, Secretary Rumsfeld's statement poses an interesting dilemma regarding the continuing involvement of the U.S. as a part of the MFO, Sinai.

The objective of this SRP is to examine the feasibility of proposing an exit strategy of U.S. forces from the MFO, Sinai. Then, the writer presents options highlighting a recommendation for either a full or partial withdrawal of U.S. forces from the MFO, Sinai. The advantages and disadvantages identified while determining the feasibility of each option provides insight for consideration prior to committing U.S. forces to future peacekeeping operations (PKO).

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MOVE OVER MOSES, WE MIGHT BE HERE TO STAY

Not long after assuming his duties as the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) on May 2, 2000, Secretary Rumsfeld stated to an interviewer from the Cable News Network (CNN) that he would "push forward with plans to withdraw 860 United States (U.S.) soldiers monitoring the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt."¹ Additionally, with regards to continued support of the Multinational Forces and Observers (MFO), Sinai, Secretary Rumsfeld stated, "I don't think that the United States has to have forces in every country of the world, and I don't think we have to have them in the same place for 20 years at a time."²

Without a doubt, Secretary Rumsfeld's interview with CNN clearly articulated his personal opinion that the U.S. should pull U.S. forces out of the Sinai. Indeed, the SECDEF appears to be justified in questioning the requirement to support peacekeeping in the MFO, Sinai, and whether or not the U.S. Sinai peacekeepers still serve a valid purpose in the region. His hard-line position brings up an important question - If the U.S. Sinai peacekeepers have fulfilled their peacekeeping mission requirements, can the U.S. still serve its national security interests in the region by politely "bowing out" of the Sinai via an exit strategy?

Why is the issue of withdrawing from the MFO, Sinai, a relevant world issue today? The SECDEF's objection to continuing U.S. support to the MFO has led many to examine the situation and ask this additional question – Does the U.S. need to maintain a U.S. peacekeeping presence in the Sinai? By his statements to CNN, Secretary Rumsfeld challenges what appears to be an indefinite period of U.S. involvement in the MFO, Sinai, – hence the origin of this paper's title, "Move Over Moses, We Might Be Here To Stay." This research paper will first provide a historical perspective of the U.S.'s involvement in the MFO, Sinai, followed by an analysis of the importance of Secretary Rumsfeld's statement concerning the withdrawal of U.S. soldiers and resources from peacekeeping duties in the MFO, Sinai. In addition to discussing the many different concerns that this issue has raised, this paper will also explore the questions and problems raised by the following thesis statement - Determine the feasibility of implementing an exit strategy for withdrawal of U.S. forces from participation in the MFO, Sinai. Finally, options for an exit strategy in this situation are presented. This author's desire is that the proposed recommendation in this paper should be considered for implementation as Department of Defense (DOD) policy for continued MFO, Sinai, peacekeeping operations.

NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY

This situation in the Middle East is clearly of vital interest to the U.S. The President's administration prioritizes its elements of power - diplomatic, economic, military, and

informational - to protect U.S. national interests. Vital interests are identified and resourced in accordance with current administration policy memorandums. Vital U.S. national interests must be in concert with the objectives outlined in these memorandums, the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Military Strategy (NMS), and the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). The NMS, the NSS, and the QDR provide a framework for engaging U.S. forces in peacekeeping operations. All of these documents must be explored to determine the purpose of the U.S. Army's continued commitment to the MFO.

Once identified as vital, an interest is then assigned the highest priority for resources and the application of these resources, or the U.S. elements of power to secure U.S. national interests.³ Second, since U.S. participation in the MFO is viewed as a vital U.S. national interest, the economic and military elements of power - providing both soldiers and resources, must be validated under the current administration's policy memorandums.

According to the National Security Strategy, "...our military forces demonstrate US resolve to honor our international commitments to the security and well-being of allies and friends."⁴ One of the prevailing themes for U.S. forces as outlined in the QDR is projecting U.S. military power, and strengthening alliances and partnerships by continuing to provide a forward presence of U.S. forces abroad. The references cited in the QDR are purposely written in general terms to provide intent and to demonstrate U.S. resolve to stand with our allies. Based on the current policy highlights identified in the QDR, one would have difficulty disputing U.S. commitment in continuing global peacekeeping operations and, in this case, one method of supporting our allies, as outlined the U.S. policy, memorandums is to continue to conduct peacekeeping participation in the Sinai.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In September 1978, realizing the criticality of protecting U.S. interests in the region, President Jimmy Carter decided to take over the lead from the United Nations (U.N.), who was hesitant to commit any more U.N. peacekeepers to the Middle East. By the end of 1978, at the time of the Camp David accords, some 14,000 personnel were already serving in U.N. forces and observer groups in the Middle East.⁵ President Carter realized that continuing to allow the U.N. to lead the peacekeeping effort in the Sinai could prove problematic. At the time, both President Carter and the U. S. Congress were unimpressed with previous U.N. peacekeeping blunders which were always subject to Soviet intervention.⁶ According to Nathan A. Pelcovits, an author on the Arab-Israeli issue, "rejection of the Camp David accords meant the Soviets would not acquiesce to a continued U.N. role. So, it became clear in 1981 that the U.N.

peacekeeping option was unacceptable. In accordance with a presidential pledge at the time the treaty was negotiated, the United States undertook the challenge to ensure the establishment and maintenance of an acceptable alternative multinational force.⁷

Therefore, the U.S. never really pressed the U.N. into action in the Sinai to take ownership of the peacekeeping requirement. As a result on March 26, 1979, the Camp David Accords eventually culminated in the Treaty of Peace signed by both Egypt's President Anwar Sadat and Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Then, a few years later, on May 18, 1981, in anticipation of the U.N.'s reluctance to support this proposal and based on the insistence of the Israeli government, the United States established a Protocol to the Treaty, which established the MFO and was later signed by all parties.⁸

These measures were clearly critical to U.S. national strategy. According to the U.S. Army War College (AWC) Strategic Formulation Model, the first step to formulating strategy is to "identify U.S. national purpose – those enduring values and beliefs which represent the moral obligations and philosophical grounds to expand the American ideals of peace and democracy."⁹ President Carter viewed peace and stability in the Middle East as an enduring value directly tied to U.S. national interests. Specifically, he recognized that stability between Israel and Egypt was a critical facet to establishing peace in the Middle East. It was commonly believed that the continuation of war between the Egyptians and the Israelis beyond the 1967 and 1973 wars would severely hamper U.S. national interests in the region.

CHARTER, MISSION, AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MFO PEACEKEEPERS

According to U.S. military doctrine, "peacekeeping operations monitor and maintain an agreement between disputing parties. They occur in an area where fighting has ceased and where former combatants have consented to a peace agreement and the presence of peacekeeping forces."¹⁰ The MFO continues to act as an independent, international peacekeeping organization functioning outside of the U.N. framework to oversee the Israeli and Egyptian observance of all Treaty provisions. The MFO is described by U.S. Army doctrine as a "classic example of a peacekeeping mission."¹¹ This particular peacekeeping mission has assisted in maintaining peace in the Sinai Peninsula since Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty governing the area in 1979.¹² During that time, from both a political and historical perspective, the U.S. took the lead in implementing the Treaty of Peace, establishing the MFO partnership with Israel and Egypt.

The arrival in the Sinai of the first U.S. peacekeepers, the 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, marked the first time that a U.S.

combat battalion had participated in a multinational peacekeeping force under international auspices since their inception in 1982. Since that time, in addition to monitoring the mandate of the Treaty, the MFO also serves as an involved and effective liaison between Israel and Egypt.

Together, the Protocol and Annex I of the Peace Treaty serve as the mandate and charter of the MFO. This combined charter provides the organization, responsibilities, functions, and the immunities of the MFO and its members. In the absence of a U.N. peacekeeping force, the MFO assumes full responsibility for monitoring Treaty compliance and reporting any Treaty violations.¹³ The Treaty outlines three security zones within Israel and Egypt and the military personnel and equipment restrictions of each. The American sector is the southern sector within Zone C and extends from Ras Muhammad on the Red Sea, along the Gulf of Aqaba, north to Elat, which is the southernmost Israeli city on the border. The American battalion is headquartered at South Camp, which is located at what used to be a small Israeli air base, Ophira, near Sharm El Sheikh.¹⁴

The U.S., Columbia, and Fiji all provide infantry battalions that perform observation missions in Zone C from 31 remote observation posts and checkpoints. In addition to the infantry battalion, the U.S. also provides a logistical support battalion and support to the MFO headquarters staff, totaling approximately 985 American troops and 15 civilian observers. The U.S. contingent comprises about 50 percent of the total MFO force of 1,987, which is provided by ten different countries.¹⁵

With the assistance of the DOD, the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Eastern Affairs is responsible for managing the military and financial participation of the MFO. The Bureau was established by the State Department in 1982 and serves as lead for the State Department on matters pertaining to all aspects and budgeting requirements for the MFO. For the past five years, annual State Department appropriations for the MFO have amounted to approximately 64 million dollars per year.¹⁶ For the past 21 years, the U.S. has continued to honor its commitment to the terms of the Treaty by providing significant funding and personnel each year.

SINAI PEACEKEEPING FROM A U.S. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Given the magnitude and intensity of what one could view as more pressing world events, it is surprising to note that the issue of withdrawing a mere 985 troops from the MFO, Sinai, could reach the attention of, and become a priority for, a relatively new SECDEF. Secretary Rumsfeld's desire to withdraw from the Sinai underscores the challenges of the Bush administration to limit U.S. involvement in peacekeeping operations not only in the Sinai, but around the world. It also reflects the administration's policy shift to reduce, or completely

disengage, forces from other global peacekeeping duties. Ultimately, this shift in policy to reduce peacekeeping duties resulted in large part due to the anticipation of the war in Iraq and the continuing Global War on Terror (GWOT).

The current U.S. involvement in support of global peacekeeping operations has overstretched U.S. military capabilities. To date, the U.S. military currently supports six U.N. peacekeeping operations and thousands of U.S. military personnel are currently performing a variety of peacekeeping roles around the world, ranging from humanitarian relief to enforcing cease-fires. As of September 15, 2002, approximately 1,897 U.S. peacekeeping troops were serving in Bosnia, and 4,477 in Kosovo. Additionally, over 37,00 U.S. troops currently serve in South Korea under a bilateral U.S.-Republic of Korea agreement and U.N. authority as technically "peacekeepers."¹⁷

Peacekeeping missions are costly endeavors and burdensome on both the military and DOD manpower and budget. In 1999, during the height of the Bosnia and Kosovo, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) led operations in which 88,000 soldiers were deployed at a cost of an estimated \$11 billion dollars.¹⁸ In addition to the money and resources expended during peacekeeping in Bosnia and Kosovo, other peacekeeping operations have cost the DOD an average of \$3 billion annually over the past 10 years.¹⁹ In fact, the U.S. is currently in arrears to the U.N. in the amount of \$1.36 billion, two-thirds the amount owed by all U.N. members.²⁰

The Bush Administration continues to reduce peacekeeping forces in Bosnia and does not plan to commit U.S. forces to the peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan.²¹ Additionally, the cost of "Enduring Freedom," the U.S. military campaign against the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan, cost between \$400 and \$800 million in its first 25 days, and could reach a total cost of an additional \$500 million to \$1 billion for the duration of the campaign.²² President Bush and his administration are purposely not taking the lead in peacekeeping operations. The U.S. military was conspicuously absent from peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan. Instead, the U.S. is advocating and funding the reestablishment of the Afghanistan National Army (ANA), whose force totals approximately 60,000 soldiers. The ANA's primary role, as a military, is to enforce peace and promote security and stability in the region for the newly appointed leader of the transitional government, President Hammed Karzi.²³

Clearly, the President and the SECDEF are assessing the U.S. military's current global commitment to peacekeeping operations against the increasingly constrained military resources. With the emphasis on the GWOT and the current U.S. led coalition war in Iraq, Secretary Rumsfeld seems committed to ensuring that all the necessary military forces and

resources are available to support the Bush administration's highest priorities. Undoubtedly, the current U.S. focus is on peacemaking, not peacekeeping.

RECENT DISCUSSION ON CONTINUED U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE MFO, SINAI

On August 2, 2002, after a conference held in Washington D.C. with Egyptian Major General Abou Bakr and retired Israeli Major General Amos Yaron, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Douglas Feith, made the following comments:

Both Egypt and Israel understand that the United States is facing competing military requirements around the world, especially since the September 11 attacks and the initiation of the war on terrorism. This is why the United States is sounding out other countries about the possibility of contributing to the MFO by assuming some of the functions it has handled. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld made clear early in his tenure that he wished to cut back some U.S. commitments overseas and would be looking closely at the Sinai. We're looking at whatever makes sense. No decision has been made yet on the exact nature of the cut. The United States is not considering ending its participation, but is keen to make a substantial cut if we can. I reaffirm that there is a strong U.S. commitment to the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.²⁴

Even though Secretary Feith stated that no decision had been made yet on the exact composition of the DOD-proposed, scaled down version of the MFO, the DOD goal appears to be a substantial reduction to the existing U.S. MFO force structure. When questioned about reducing the MFO force to a very token presence of 25 to 50 as opposed to the current 850 soldiers, Secretary Feith responded, "No decision has been made on the exact nature of the cut, but the U.S. wants to make as substantial a reduction as it is rational to make."²⁵

In one pertinent article, the actual size of the scaled-down MFO was mentioned as removing the majority of the 900 American peacekeepers and leaving behind a "symbolic" headquarters.²⁶ An additional article, released January 27, 2002, cited a senior defense official as eluding to the withdrawal of the majority of the U.S. peacekeepers in favor of a leaving a "symbolic" headquarters.

The Pentagon has decided to remove the vast majority of 900 American peacekeepers from the Sinai Peninsula and leave behind a symbolic headquarters, a senior defense official told The Jerusalem Post on January 27, 2002, "We're finally just doing it. Nobody should take it personally," the official said. No date for the redeployment has been set. Since last April 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has made it clear that he would like to see the American mission in the Sinai end. The American troops in the Sinai make up the bulk of the MFO, an independent international peacekeeping and

verification organization established by Egypt and Israel to monitor the security arrangements after their 1979 peace treaty.²⁷

In addition to Secretary Feith's comments which suggest a major cut in the MFO force structure, multiple sources also predict that the DOD objective for the MFO will be a substantial reduction. The specifics regarding the actual plan or timeline for the MFO reduction are currently not available. However, based on Secretary Feith's statement and specifically the use of the term "substantial" when referring to the size of the reduction, perhaps retaining a small "symbolic headquarters" appears to be the basis of the plan.

Furthermore, Secretary Feith stated "that much of the mission is political, rather than military in nature ... as more confidence-building than peacekeeping between Egypt and Israel. These two countries are at peace, he said, and the MFO functions in a monitoring role. He said the observation force contributes to confidence in a peace treaty that has lasted for 20 years, adding that "a substantial amount of confidence has been built up in that period."²⁸ From this statement, one could surmise that the mission of the U.S. infantry battalion serving as observers is no longer necessary and; the Sinai withdrawal is justified because these two countries are at peace. Therefore, other than symbolic, or for political reasons which could theoretically be facilitated by a small headquarters element, the requirement no longer exists to maintain an infantry battalion as observers. On the other hand, neither the Israelis nor the Egyptians concur with Secretary Feith's assessment that the U.S. contribution to peace between these countries is no longer necessary. Secretary Feith may be correct that, since its inception, the MFO peacekeepers have done just that - contributed to maintaining a lasting peace between the Israelis and the Egyptians. However, according to Ms. Christine Shelly, a former State Department spokesperson, it is an "uneasy" peace.²⁹

Having served as a battalion task force commander in the MFO, Sinai, this author would tend to agree with the above assessment by the former State Department spokesperson. Peace between these two countries is definitely "uneasy." During this author's tour while observing the U.S. sector, violations by both Egyptians and Israelis were noted by U.S. peacekeepers during the the time period January 1998 to July 1998. During this time, navy patrol ships, helicopters, and jet aircraft from both sides violated the international boundaries defined in the provisions outlined in the Treaty. These violations were assessed by the MFO Director in Rome, Italy, and subsequently classified as merely military "posturing," with no intention of either side to engage the other. Though these Treaty violations were regarded as military "posturing" without the intent of either side to engage in conflict, they do demonstrate that

though peace has been maintained between Israel and Egypt, this peace can be described as “uneasy.”

POTENTIAL DISADVANTAGES TO A U.S. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE MFO, SINAI

Lieutenant Colonel Gal Luft, a former Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) commander in Rafah, and current doctoral candidate at Johns Hopkins University, is adamantly opposed to any plan to implement a withdrawal from the Sinai. He cites the following reasons why he feels a withdrawal is not sound:

“The timing of such a change – especially in light of the deterioration in Egyptian-Israeli relations since the beginning of the Al Aqsa intifada - is questionable. At a time when other voices are calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Saudi Arabia, a withdrawal from Sinai – even if only a reduction - could symbolize to many a decreasing U.S. interest in the region. It could also deny the recently violent Egyptian-Israeli-Palestinian border area an important and necessary cooling-off mechanism. While the U.S. has clearly paid its dues in both casualties and treasury to the Egyptian-Israeli peace endeavor, withdrawal of its forces from the MFO may come at the lowest point of Egypt-Israel relations since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. This current deterioration in relations originated in the outbreak of the Al Aqsa intifada and the Israeli use of heavy weapons against Palestinian targets. Additionally, the debate over the future of the MFO and the prospect of U.S. withdrawal from the Sinai comes during a period in which the Bush administration is already being criticized by many in the region for its insufficient involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict. At a time when Arab countries are urging the U.S. to introduce peacekeeping forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the sight of U.S. troops departing the region is not likely to be well received; it will enhance the image that America is abdicating its responsibilities in the region. Israel and Egypt both oppose an American withdrawal, and some within the Bush administration and outside it caution that tough times in the Middle East make this an inauspicious time to leave the area.”³⁰

According to Luft, a U.S. withdrawal could be perceived by the Egyptians and the Israelis as a lack of commitment to not only no longer honor Treaty obligations, but to support other Middle East peace initiatives. As such, a withdrawal could create additional unrest in the region potentially resulting in an escalation of continuing Arab-Israeli hostilities. The U.S. could also be viewed negatively by the international community and the U.N. as not honoring their commitments to other nations. Subsequent peacemaking or peacekeeping events requiring U.S. involvement in mediation may create suspicion among future allies and partners.

Another concern mentioned by Luft is that “full withdrawal of the American contingent without providing a suitable substitute means that the MFO would be stripped of its main combat component – perhaps even bringing about the demise of the entire organization.”³¹ If the U.S.

pulled out, this demise could cause an “implosion” of the MFO, resulting in the rest of the MFO contributing nations following the U.S. lead and also withdrawing their forces from the MFO. Monetarily, the U.S. contribution of \$64 million would be sorely missed. The U.S. provides roughly about 30 % of the annual MFO budget with Israel and Egypt also contributing equal amounts of \$64 million, with smaller donations also received from Germany, Japan, and Switzerland.³²

In the final analysis, the major disadvantage of a U.S. withdrawal would be the difficulty in attempting to accurately predict what the reaction to a U.S. exit will cause within the region, or among current allies. Additionally to be feasible, any plan for an exit strategy must continue to favorably serve U.S. national interests. “Politely bowing out” of the region would only be considered feasible if the withdrawal of U.S. troops did not disrupt peace initiatives, undermine U.S. foreign policy objectives, or jeopardize U.S. national interests. These potential negative repercussions certainly are risks which should be considered when implementing any plan for a U.S. withdrawal.

POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES FOR A WITHDRAWAL FROM THE MFO, SINAI

A U.S. withdrawal frees up an infantry battalion task force, a logistical support battalion, and staff officers totaling some 985 soldiers who could be committed elsewhere in support of other missions like the GWOT or “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” Also, the war-fighting readiness of the Army National Guard infantry battalions, who now train as observers to support the MFO, would improve. These units can once again focus on their Mission Essential Task List (METL) training instead of training on peacekeeping tasks. Stability and morale within the National Guard would improve as the operational - tempo and the mobilization of these units scheduled to participate in the MFO declines.

A U.S. withdrawal would send an international message that the U.S. no longer desires to remain globally engaged as the “world’s policeman.” This withdrawal would also cause the U.N. to become engaged to find a solution to Sinai peacekeeping, and to take a more aggressive role in tackling the Arab-Israeli conflict. Financially, the U.S. could free-up \$64 million per year that could be used for other important missions.

CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING AN EXIT STRATEGY

Gaining a revision to the 1978 Treaty of Peace should be considered and agreed upon by both Israelis and the Egyptians before the U.S. can seriously consider exploring options to implement an exit strategy. Secretary Feith should continue to work the details of the DOD withdrawal plan with all the parties involved. Though it may not be fully supported by all the

MFO participants, specifically the Israelis and the Egyptians, a Treaty revision for a U.S. withdrawal should be agreed upon in principle. This would help legitimize a U.S. withdrawal in the eyes of the U.N. and the international community.

In the past, the U.S. has demonstrated a positive statement of their resolve and support to the Middle East peace process by providing U.S. soldiers for the MFO, Sinai. Caution must be exercised before implementing any plan to disengage U.S. forces from the MFO. Any plan must minimize potential negative repercussions which could circumvent U.S. commitment to support U.S. national interests – “to honor our international commitments to the security and well-being of allies and friends.”³³

OPTIONS FOR A MFO WITHDRAWAL

A proponent of keeping U.S. soldiers in the Sinai peacekeeping mission and also an advocate for using U.S. forces as peacekeepers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Luft, offered some options for withdrawal from the Sinai.³⁴ According to Luft, “The Pentagon should search for more restrained alternatives, such as a piecemeal withdrawal over a period of several years, or sharing the burden on a rotating basis with countries of comparable military quality (e.g. NATO countries).”³⁵ While Luft suggests a more cautious approach over time, comments made by both Secretary Rumsfeld and Secretary Feith indicate that the DOD is in favor of a quick and substantial withdrawal, not one extended over a lengthy period.³⁶ Both Secretary Rumsfeld and Secretary Feith are convinced that Egypt and Israel are at peace, and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the Sinai will not undermine peace between these two nations, or the Middle East peace process.³⁷

This paper proposes that the U.S. could lessen its MFO burden by sharing rotations with other NATO countries. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that other NATO or U.N. countries would be willing to become involved in a rotational basis with the U.S. Currently, the U.S. is in arrears to the U.N. for \$1.3 billion in nonpayment of previous peacekeeping debts.³⁸ Additionally, since the U.S. reluctance to take a leading role in the peacekeeping effort in Afghanistan, NATO could be apprehensive about contemplating any commitment to enter the MFO on a rotational basis just to alleviate the U.S. peacekeeping burden in the Sinai. However, if the U.S. did pay its back debt to the U.N. and continue to honor its commitments to the rebuilding of Afghanistan and in the future, Iraq, then the withdrawal of the infantry battalion and the support battalion may be feasible. In addition to the infantry and support battalions, the U.S. also provides a small group of officers and NCOs known as the U.S. Army Element (USAE) to serve on the Force Commander's staff. The USAE contingent includes the Chief of Staff and the

Chief of Support.³⁹ This proposal does not advocate the removal of the USAE. This writer's opinion is that a total withdrawal of all U.S. soldiers would be detrimental to U.S. interests and it would project a negative image, and thus, the USAE should remain. With the exception of the 25 person USAE contingent, this proposal would involve the withdrawal of the remaining 960 soldiers,

The withdrawal would be predicated on an agreement with the U.N. to pick up responsibility for the MFO requirement of U.S. troops from the MFO. As an offer of compromise to the U.N., even though the U.S. proposes a withdrawal of troops, the U.S. should consider offering payment of its \$1.3 billion in debt to the U.N. either in part or full.

A rotational option could be another option that would reduce U.S. presence. As a concept of support, based on how many other countries in the U.N. that would be willing to commit to the MFO, the U.S. would rotate with these other countries equally. For example, if two other countries agree to support, then the U.S. would rotate every third rotation. In this compromise, the U.S. would still demonstrate long term support, but, reduces its support to providing soldiers once every third rotation, or one six-month U.S. rotation every 12 months.

Complete withdrawal by the U.S., or the rotational option offered above, would have greater acceptance by the Israelis and the Egyptians if the U.N. replacement battalion came from one of the current MFO participants. These include countries who currently have strong diplomatic relationships with both the Israelis and the Egyptians, such as France, Italy, Canada, or the Netherlands. These countries would be best suited to backfill the loss of the U.S. battalion since these countries already contribute to the MFO. In time, with additional negotiations, the U.S. could eventually withdraw from being a participant in the rotational scheme, if they so desire.

Another option to be considered is the withdrawal of the 1st Support Battalion, a 260-member logistic component. Their support mission could be contracted to a civilian contractor. Existing civilian contractors are already providing dining facility and other logistical support to the MFO. Those contracts could be expanded to perform all the functions currently provided by the support battalion. One exception is that the UH-1H helicopter company would have to continue to provide support to the MFO. This unit has ten UH-1H rotary wing aircraft which support the three infantry battalions and the civilian observers.

A final option to be considered is that the U.S. maintains status quo and remains committed to the MFO.

The issue of U.S. forces withdrawing from the Sinai was first raised by the Bush administration during Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit to Washington in March 2001, and later

addressed to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in April 2001. According to media reports, Mubarak opposes any changes to the MFO because of increased tensions between Israel and Egypt and current violence in the region.⁴⁰

Some may argue that from a tactical perspective, that the deployment of U.S. soldiers in the Sinai serves little, if any, purpose. Manning remote outposts as observers strung out along 120 miles across the Sinai Desert does not provide a strong military deterrent. Even though U.S. checkpoints are not ideally integrated with the Israeli and Egyptian border crossing areas, the Israeli Prime Minister is still convinced that the U.S. presence in the Sinai is a deterrent to the number of arms smuggled into Israel from Egypt to support Palestinian terrorists.⁴¹

As such, based on the accurate and timely reporting of these boundary “posturing” violations by the U.S. peacekeepers, both the Israelis and the Egyptians realize that their Treaty violations are being monitored and reported from the U.S. Sinai sector. Even though the U.S. observation posts are not ideally located to observe arms smuggling, the Israelis and the Egyptians remain erroneously convinced that attempts to smuggle arms across the borders into Israel by terrorist organizations are seen and reported by the American peacekeepers.⁴² Therefore, the argument can be made that the U.S. peacekeeping presence in the Sinai still serves a tactical purpose. The reporting of Treaty violations is ongoing today and the “uneasy” peace continues.

U.S. soldiers in the Sinai are tactically and directly tied to the furthering the U.S. national purpose and interests in the region - an enduring commitment to peace in the Middle East. U.S. soldiers serving as peacekeepers are seen by both the Israelis and the Egyptians as serving a meaningful purpose – to enforce the terms of the Treaty and peace in the Middle East. Luft cautions, “ Whichever path the Pentagon chooses to take, it should act with awareness that the MFO's role is more than symbolic. Without the presence of U.S. troops in the region, it is doubtful whether the MFO could continue to play an important role in keeping the peace between Egypt and Israel.”⁴³

RECOMMENDATION

The U.S. took the lead in implementing the Treaty of Peace in 1979, which established the MFO partnership with Israel and Egypt, and for the past 21 years, the U.S. has continued to honor its commitment to the terms of the Treaty by providing significant funding and personnel each year. Given both the historical and political perspective, it makes sense to consider the following recommendation: That the U.S. infantry battalion continue to serve as peacekeepers in the MFO, Sinai, and the 1st Support

Battalion withdraw. The support battalion functions, minus the UH-1H helicopter company mission, could be contracted out for civilian support.

It is not feasible at this time to withdraw those U.S. soldiers who are currently serving as observers from the MFO, Sinai. Presently, both Israel and Egypt are satisfied with the U.S. participation in accordance with the obligations outlined in the original Treaty of Peace. Additionally, any attempted U.S. withdrawal could be perceived by the Egyptians and the Israelis as a lack of commitment to honor Treaty obligations and as U.S. reluctance to support other Middle East peace initiatives. Therefore, a U.S. withdrawal could create additional unrest in the region potentially resulting in an escalation of continuing Arab-Israeli hostilities.

Although he initially contradicted Secretary Rumsfeld's remarks about withdrawing from the Sinai, Secretary of State Powell has recently been quiet on the subject. When referring to supporting the MFO with U.S. soldiers, he stated that "It's not a very exciting mission, and it costs something. At the moment, however, we have an obligation to Israel and Egypt to support this multinational force."⁴⁴ That obligation to which Vice President Cheney referred is providing peacekeepers and resources in accordance with the terms outlined in the Treaty of Peace. While in stark contrast to Secretary Rumsfeld's initiative to remove the majority of U.S. soldiers from the MFO, Vice President Cheney views continued U.S. presence in the Sinai as a commitment to long term stability in the region. On March 13, 2002, Vice President Cheney in a speech to the soldiers at the MFO South Camp referred to the Sinai mission as "a critical center of American national interests."⁴⁵ It is unfortunate that the Bush administration and DOD today are faced with the dilemma that the Treaty agreement brokered by President Carter did not outline the terms to implement an exit strategy.

SUMMARY

In his speech to the Berliners on May 23, 2002, President Bush commented that "concerned nations must remain actively engaged in critical regional disputes to avoid explosive escalation and minimize human suffering."⁴⁶ President Bush ties this comment specifically to the Palestinian and Israeli issue. The President states that "the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is critical because of the toll of human suffering, America's close relationship with the state of Israel and key Arab states, and that region's importance to other global priorities of the United States."⁴⁷

There appears, however, to be a disconnect between President Bush's admonition of remaining actively engaged in the troubled regions of the world, at the same time as DOD is proposing a disengagement from the Sinai, especially in a region as volatile as the Middle East.

This author disagrees with the DOD assessment that a withdrawal will not jeopardize peace between Israel and Egypt. Based on personal experience in the region as a former battalion commander in the MFO, this author agrees with the position taken by Ms. Shelley, a former State Department spokesperson when she described peace between Israel and Egypt as “uneasy.”

Citing the past history of U.S. military involvement, a recent guest lecturer at the U.S. AWC stated that students, as future strategists, should delete “exit strategy” from their vocabulary, because, as a rule, wherever the U.S. military goes to fight a war - they stay. Therefore, talking about an exit strategy is a mute point. This author concurs - talking about an exit strategy from the Sinai at this time should be just that – a mute point. Based on the analysis provided in this paper, maintaining a National Guard infantry battalion of 560 U.S. soldiers in the Sinai, and additionally providing \$64 million per year funding for the peacekeeping operation is a small price to pay in order to protect U.S. vital national interests in the region.

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⁵ Nathan A. Pelcovits, Peacekeeping on Arab-Israeli Fronts (USA, Westvie Press Inc, 1984), 6.

⁶ Ibid, 6.

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¹⁰ "Making Peace While Staying Ready for War: the Challenges of U.S. Military Participation in Peace Operations," Congressional Budget Office, December 1999, 2; available from <http://www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index=1809&sequence=0>; Internet; accessed 30 September 2002.

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¹⁴ Segal, 82.

¹⁵ Spoehr, 6-7.

¹⁶ Benjamin Nelson, "Peacekeeping, Assessment of U.S. Participation in the Multinational Force and Observers," U.S. General Accounting Office, Report to Congressional Requesters (August 1995): 30.

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²¹ Nina M. Serafino, "Peacekeeping: Issues of U.S. Military Involvement," Issue Brief for Congress, 14 March 2003, 1; available from <http://hutchison.senate.gov/Foreign7.pdf>; Internet; accessed 13 April 2003.

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³⁶ "U.S. Seeking More Efficient Middle East Peacekeeping Mission," 1.

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⁴¹ Hassan-Gordan, 1.

⁴² Shelley, 22 October 2002.

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